



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

U.S. Ambassador to the AU, Cindy L. Courville, Presents Copy of Her Credentials to AU Chairperson Alpha O. Konare

The newly appointed United States Ambassador to the African Union, Cindy L. Courville, presented a copy of her credentials to African Union Chairperson Alpha O. Konare on December 22, 2006.

Ambassador Courville, formerly Special Assistant to U.S. President George W. Bush and Senior Director for Africa at the National Security Council, is a noted

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United States Ambassador to the African Union, Cindy L. Courville (L), and African Union Chairperson Alpha O. Konare shaking hands at the ceremony.

America Mourns Gerald Ford, Former U.S. President



Gerald R. Ford

By Michael Jay Friedman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Across the United States, messages of sympathy and fond remembrance followed the death of Gerald Ford, the nation's 38th president.

Ford died in California December 26 at the age of 93. Among the many Americans recalling him with praise and affection are figures who served in Ford's administration. A confident leader who did not fear being upstaged by subordinates, Ford surrounded himself with many promising figures whose careers would carry them to higher office.

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U.S. Ambassador to the AU, Cindy L. Courville, . . .

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African expert, who has three decades of experience in research, study and involvement in African life and government.

Ambassador Courville, the first Ambassador from a non-African country accredited solely to the African Union, told AU Chairperson Konare that her appointment comes at an

historic moment for Africa and the United States.

The African Union has now established itself as a robust successor to the Organization of African Unity, with its Commission embarking on initiatives to improve the health, safety, security, livelihood and freedom of the peoples of Africa. She likened the emergence of

the African Union on the world stage as akin to that of the transformation of the League of Nations into the United Nations.

Ambassador Courville told Chairperson Konare that the United States wants to be a full partner with the African Union and looks forward to working with the member nations. ♦

America Mourns Gerald Ford, Former U.S. President . . .

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"Americans will always admire Gerald Ford's unflinching performance of duty and the honorable conduct of his administration, and the great rectitude of the man himself," said President George W. Bush, whose father served in Ford's administration. "We mourn the loss of such a leader, and our 38th President will always have a special place in our nation's memory."

Vice President Cheney, who served as Ford's chief of staff, described Ford as a "dear friend and mentor to me until this very day. ... Gerald Ford embodied the best values of a great generation: decency, integrity, and devotion to duty." In a December 26 statement, Cheney praised Ford for bringing strength, wisdom and good judgment to the presidency at a time of constitutional crisis, and for leaving office with the nation's confidence and faith restored.

Alexander Haig, who served both Ford and President Ronald Reagan as chief of staff, and later also served Reagan as secretary of state, said Ford "had to bring our country back [following President Richard Nixon's resignation] and

make it whole again and he did it with dignity, he did it with great, great skill and sensitivity."

Alan Greenspan served as Ford's chief White House economic adviser before being appointed to the Federal Reserve Board by President Reagan. "Jerry Ford was the most decent man I ever encountered in public life," he said on learning of Ford's death. "His reputation has risen year by year since he left office."

Former presidents and their surviving relatives are among those praising Ford's character and dedication.

Patricia Nixon Cox, daughter of the 37th U.S. president, Richard Nixon, recalled her father's "deep respect for Gerald Ford as an honorable and dedicated public servant."

Jimmy Carter, Ford's 1976 electoral opponent and the 39th president, called Ford "a man of the highest integrity" and "an outstanding statesman ... who frequently rose above politics." Carter's 1977 inaugural speech began with unstinting praise for Ford, the candidate he had defeated -- an unprecedented beginning for a new president's term.

Ronald Reagan, the 40th president, challenged Ford for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination and briefly considered Ford as his running mate in 1980. His widow, Nancy Reagan, praised Ford as a "dear friend and close political ally" whose "accomplishments and devotion to our country are vast."

President George H.W. Bush, who served as both Ford's chief diplomat in China and then as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, called Ford "one of the most decent and capable men I ever met." In a joint statement, former President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton recalled that Ford "brought Americans together during a difficult chapter in our history with strength, integrity, and humility. ... All Americans should be grateful for his life of service."

Funeral arrangements for President Gerald R. Ford will be announced at the Gerald Ford Memorial Web site.

The full text of Cheney's statement and a transcript of President George W. Bush's remarks on December 27 are available on the White House Web site./ ♦

International Medical Corps Helps Darfur Refugees Despite Danger

By Eileen Kane
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Violence along the Sudan-Chad border has risen in recent weeks, endangering many seeking safety and expanding the conflict area. California-based International Medical Corps (IMC) is one of the nongovernmental organizations continuing to work inside Sudan and in Eastern Chad to help nearly 110,000 people displaced by the violence.

IMC official Ben Hemingway described his recent trip from Sudan to just inside the Chad border for USINFO.

The organization, which receives funding from the United States and other donors, is a global humanitarian nonprofit organization dedicated to saving lives and alleviating suffering through health care training and relief and development programs.

IMC had been providing transport from a camp in the Jebel Moun area inside western Darfur to the Kounoungo camp in Eastern Chad, but the shuttle had become irregular due to dangerous conditions. Jebel Moun had been attacked in October. The area had not received any visits from humanitarian groups for some time due to the constant ethnic violence and rebel group activity. Military escort was required for the group's tense three-hour trips across the hot, semiarid area to the



IMC sent a team of people to help the refugees get to Kounoungo Camp near Guereda. (Photo by: Ben Hemingway)

camp.

"The closer we got to the border the more heavily armed everyone became -- rebels, bandits, soldiers and civilians all in an uneasy and tense coexistence," Hemingway said.

Once across the border inside Chad, "we were met by the sheik of the Djabal tribes that were attacked in Jebel Moun," Heningway said. "He got in the vehicle and we proceeded off into the bush to find the group that had assembled to meet with us.

"We drove for almost 30 more minutes [toward the camp]. ... Then the sheik got out of the vehicle and we noticed several men on horseback. Immediately, I thought they were Janjaweed [armed militia], but then we began to see men and women and children emerging and assembling under the shady acacia and mango trees." The refugees had been hiding until they could be certain of who was approaching.

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America's Muslim Community Honors Holocaust Victims

By Elizabeth Kelleher
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Muslim-American leaders on December 20 visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, met with Holocaust survivors in its memorial room and lit candles to honor the memory of death-camp victims.

"At a time when mistrust and conflict plagues many parts of the world, it is important for people of different religions and races to unite in positive discourse," said Arsalan Iftikhar, the legal director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations and one of the visitors to the museum. He said the visit was a success and that he hoped it would lead to even more dialogue.



Imam Mohamed Magid of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, surrounded by Holocaust survivors and leaders of the Muslim community, speaks at a ceremony at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington commemorating Jewish suffering under the Nazis. (Janine Sides/State Dept.)

The visit was the idea of Imam Mohamed Magid, executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, Washington's largest Muslim center and mosque, which serves 5,000 Muslim families.

Sara Bloomfield, director of the museum, said that such a public statement by Muslim leaders was "a first" and that their idea to come was as important as the event itself.

The visit was an "important gesture at this moment in time," Bloomfield told USINFO. "They reached out to us, which I think is wonderful. They wanted to come here, to have a public expression of solidarity."

In speaking of the Holocaust to those gathered in the hall, Magid said, "I speak on behalf of American Muslims, all of us who believe that we have to learn from the les-

sons of history and to commit ourselves: 'Never again.'" Magid postponed a trip to Saudi Arabia for the annual hajj in order to visit the museum.

At the event, Johanna Neumann, a Holocaust survivor, described how Albanian Muslims saved her and her family from the Nazis. She said Albania at the time was 85 percent Muslim and that she and her family were protected by Muslims in their town. "Everybody knew who we were, and nobody would have thought of denouncing us," Neumann said.

Akbar Ahmad, an Islamic scholar from American University, called the Holocaust "one of the low points in history." Ahmad urged all people to condemn anti-Semitism and to equally condemn "widespread Islam-phobia," which he said is evident when people call

Muslims "terrorists." He said anti-Semitism and Islam-phobia are linked: "To check one, we have to check the other."

In addition to Iftikhar, Magid and Ahmad, visitors to the museum included Hassan Ibrahim of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Rizwan Jaka, Afeefa Syeed, Robert Marro and Rahima Ullah, all affiliated with the All Dulles Area Muslim Society.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum is "about bystanders and for bystanders," Bloomfield said. "But yesterday was a day when we didn't stand by," she said. "We spoke out, and we did so together."

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

American Muslims Go on Hajj

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- More American Muslims are expected to perform the hajj in 2006 than in previous years, according to Muslim organizations. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia is a religious obligation for all Muslims who are able to make the journey.

"It is very special. There are 8 million Muslims in America, and if you get to make it, it is really very special," Sa'ad, a State Department employee about to leave for the hajj, told USINFO. Preparation is essential. He said American mosques offer instructions for the hajj, using PowerPoint presentations to explain the ritual steps of the pilgrimage and the requirements for making a good hajj.

Tarik al-Lagany, information officer at the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, told USINFO that the number of American pilgrims has been increasing. "Last year, about 15,000 went from the U.S.," he said. He attributes this to the growth of Islam in the United States. He said about 2.5 million people from around the world attend the hajj each year.

"Logistically, it is a huge challenge to be able to accommodate all these people," he said. "As the number of Muslims in the world continues to grow exponentially, we will have to keep expanding those facilities." In pre-oil days the hajj was a major source of income for Saudi Arabia, but today, he said, "we see it as an obligation of ours to host all these people and we try to bring as many as we can over, provide them with airfare and everything."

Travel agencies offer hajj tour pack-

ages, but a pilgrim cannot just get a visa and go. To keep the vast numbers manageable, a quota is set for each country by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an



An adult and child listen to a sermon at the Islamic Center of the Capital District in Albany, New York. (File photo AP Images)

independent international organization concerned with Muslim issues.

Abdullah M. Khouj, imam of the Islamic Center of Washington, said: "I've never encountered any difficulties. ... Everything is facilitated as we want," when going on hajj from America. "This is one of the greatneses of this country ... people do practice their religion freely," he told USINFO. He encourages interfaith dialogue at the Islamic Center, a jewel of Islamic architecture built in 1947. "Communication is the key to understanding," he said.

"What I really believe is what the Quran teaches us: if you are in another country or another culture,

you have to respect the culture that you are in. And before you go to that place you have to have an understanding of what you are supposed to do," he said. In America, he said, "one of its basic foundations is the freedom of religion, and they have to be honest that as long as you are within the boundaries and don't make people feel suspicious about you, then nobody will bother you."

Khouj has ministered to a diverse congregation for 23 years and has seen much community acceptance. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, he recalls: "It was amazing if you came that day. I was shocked myself that the courtyard was full of roses and flowers from all the neighbors. They just wanted to show their support and that they are with us." President Bush paid a visit to the center at that time, emphasizing the importance of the Muslim community in America.

Al-Lagany said, "For the most part Americans have been open-minded people." He has noticed a curiosity about Islam, which he says is a good thing. "In the Quran there are several verses that say all believers in God, specifically Christians and Jews, must be respected. There is nowhere in the Quran that these people shouldn't be respected, let alone hated, attacked and killed. ... If people take the time out to learn about it, they'll discover a lot of the untruths that have been said about it," he said.

Assistant Attorney General Wan J. Kim at the Department of Justice told USINFO about the U.S. commitment to "protecting the civil rights of all Americans, including those of the Muslim faith." He said

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U.S. Nonprofit Group Is “Nation’s Voice on Mental Illness”

By Jeffrey Thomas
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Three mothers and a father whose children were mentally ill began meeting in each other's living rooms in the 1970s to offer each other support and guidance in making the sometimes complex U.S. mental health care system work for their children. Their vision of a self-help organization dedicated to improving the lives of Americans who suffer from serious mental illness and their families led to the founding in 1979 of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Today, NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots organization helping the more than 15 million people living with serious mental illnesses such as major depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. It has 200,000 members and brings together 1,100 state and local nonprofits that operate with a significant degree of independence but work toward a common goal.

NAMI is “the nation’s voice on mental illness,” according to its Web site. It focuses on research, education, support and advocacy for the people directly affected by mental illness -- the patients and their family members -- according to Executive Director Michael Fitzpatrick. “This gives us a unique perspective, different from that of doctors and bureaucrats,” he told USINFO recently.

In its education role, NAMI offers courses and sends speakers out into the community. Family members go into schools to teach teachers about mental illness and, as part of a program called “In Our Own Voice,” those who have recovered from mental illness talk about their

illness and recovery to a church, school or other community group.

NAMI delivers science-based messages to the public, health professionals and traditionally underserved populations. The basic message is that mental illnesses are biologically based brain disorders, and there are highly effective treatments available if people will recognize the need and act on it.



In Utah in 2000, for example, the state NAMI affiliate developed “Hope for Tomorrow,” a school-based program to reduce the stigma of mental illness and make it easier for young people to seek help, especially those contemplating suicide. The program was developed in response to a request from a local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) concerned that in each of the past 12 years a student at the secondary school had died by suicide.

Research shows that “Hope for To-

morrow” has been successful in getting teens to seek help. Suicide, depression, anorexia and bulimia “are topics that are hard for teachers, parents and school administrators to address, but Hope for Tomorrow has shown that they can be successfully dealt with in schools,” said Sherri Wittwer, the executive director of NAMI Utah.

“Hope for Tomorrow” has expanded to more than 60 schools in Utah and Oklahoma.

For those who work directly with the mentally ill, NAMI offers in 20 states a 10-week course that explains the hardship of mental illness from the families’ point of view. It is team-taught by five people, including two family members, two who have suffered from mental illness and one mental health professional.

In its support role, NAMI volunteers respond to 4,000 callers a month on its telephone help line. Some calls come from family members confronting the social, legal and financial impact of chronic mental illness. Others come from people dealing with the acute or recovery phases of their illnesses.

Most state affiliates offer information on the local mental health system, patient and family rights and how to obtain essential services and entitlements. NAMI says its national Web site receives more than 5.4 million visitors a year.

Support groups for the mentally ill and their families are another service NAMI offers. Those who have been through the guilt and emotional turmoil caused by a family member’s illness often are best able to help other families. They are

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A total of 284 families -- 1,326 people -- needed transport. The refugees already had been victimized twice -- once when driven from their homes, again when driven from the safety of the camp near Jebel Moun. Now, they were in danger again due to the fighting along the border.

The refugees were visibly relieved that aid workers had come to help them, Hemingway said.

Hemingway said many men were ready to leave because they were the most likely to be killed. Some men wanted the women and children to remain so that they could harvest the grain and care for the livestock -- the only security they had to bolster their sense of safety. They were fearful to move about inside Chad and face the possibility of being victimized again. The team spent hours talking to the group, gathering names and urging them

to leave. The livestock and grain would have to be left behind.

Later, IMC sent two different convoys a few days apart, managing to transport about 500 people to the Kounoungou camp.

IMC's 30 foreign staff in Eastern Chad -- consisting of doctors, nurses, midwives and nutritional experts -- and approximately 200 local staff will continue to help those fleeing the fighting, Hemingway said.

The United States is pushing for the full implementation of U.N. agreements to reduce violence in Darfur. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has asked the international community to tell Sudan that "in no uncertain terms" it must act to protect its civilians and make it possible for aid workers to reach people in need. (See related article ([http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-](http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061220182457AKllen-noCcM0.2730677)

[english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061220182457AKllen-noCcM0.2730677](http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061220182457AKllen-noCcM0.2730677)).)

A map (http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/sudan/images/satellite/) of the Sudan-Chad border area is available on the U.S. Agency for International Development Web site.

Hemingway's story (http://www.imcworldwide.org/fn_ben_eastern_chad.shtml) and more information about the International Medical Corps are available on the organization's Web site.

For more information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

U.S. Nonprofit Group Is "Nation's Voice on Mental Illness" . . .

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sources of information on treatment programs, ways of coping and such practical matters as how to apply for government disability benefits.

NAMI affiliates offer mentoring programs and courses for people recovering from mental illness and their families.

In its advocacy role, NAMI lobbies all levels of government for increased funding for research on treatment and cures for mental illness and improved health insurance, housing, rehabilitation pro-

grams and job opportunities.

NAMI issued the first comprehensive state-by-state analysis of mental health care systems in the United States. The report, Grading the States 2006, highlights innovative programs in each state and offers recommendations for improving care, especially in states where mental health care systems are rated as inadequate.

The nation's mental health care system must "catch up with advances in science and with proven, cost-effective treatment practices," the report says.

The full text ([http://www.nami.org/gtstemplate.cfm?](http://www.nami.org/gtstemplate.cfm?section=grading_the_states&lstdid=682)

[section=grading_the_states&lstdid=682](http://www.nami.org/gtstemplate.cfm?section=grading_the_states&lstdid=682)) of the report and additional information (<http://www.nami.org/>) on NAMI are available on the organization's Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Slower U.S. Economy Still Expected To Drive Global Growth in 2007

By Jaroslaw Anders
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – The U.S. economy is expected to slow in 2007, but policies that determine exchange rates better reflect market conditions and programs that stimulate export growth will help avoid economic volatility in the United States and the world, according to U.S. government and private-sector economists.

In a report released in November, the White House Council of Economic Advisers projected that growth of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), after adjustment for inflation, will slow from 3.1 percent in 2006 to 2.9 percent in 2007, mainly due to a weaker U.S. housing market. "These rates will make the United States the fastest growing major industrialized country in the world," said the council chairman, Edward Lazear.

Most analysts agree with the assessment of the council: the U.S. economy, considered the "locomotive" of global growth, will keep rolling ahead in 2007 -- though at a slower pace than in 2006 -- and pulling much the world with it.

He cited a continued strong stock market, growth in real wages, lower energy costs and solid consumer confidence as evidence of a generally healthy U.S. economy. "As long as we keep our policies consistent with economic growth, which means keep our taxes low, make sure that we don't put ... strong impediments to trade and business in there, I think we're on track for a strong economy," Lazear said.

But some private-sector economists expect the U.S. expansion to slow more -- to between 2.5 percent and 2 percent -- and are concerned about a lingering inflation threat. U.S. annualized core inflation,



Edward Lazear

which excludes energy and food prices, edged down in the second half of the year from a peak of 3.7 percent in May but remains "uncomfortably high," according to the Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben S. Bernanke.

Economists point out that even a moderate slowdown in the U.S.

economy would have global repercussions.

"There simply is no way around the fact that a slower U.S. economy has an impact on the rest of the world," Ira Kalish, director of Global Economics and Business at Deloitte Research, an economic analysis firm, said in an interview.

Like most economists, he is worried about the huge U.S. trade deficit and corresponding surpluses of major U.S. trading partners. Some estimate the U.S. current account deficit, the broadest measure of a country's external accounts, will reach more than \$870 billion, or 6.8 percent of GDP in 2006. If a cooling U.S. market stops absorbing massive imports and foreign capital, some observers warn, the global trade patterns will undergo a potentially destabilizing readjustment.

Most analysts say, however, that U.S. economic slowdown is more

likely to usher a gradual, "orderly" rebalancing of international trade. For that to happen, they say, the United States would have to allow the value of the dollar to depreciate even further, curb consumer spending and strengthen export performance. Countries with current account surpluses would have to do just the opposite: let their currencies appreciate against the dollar, boost domestic spending and allow domestic demand to compensate for lower exports.

"Obviously, given huge imbalance in the global economy ... it makes sense for Europe and other regions to shift away from export-oriented growth and more toward domestic demand," said Kalish.



Nariman Behravesh

A high-level U.S. delegation recently traveled to China to argue for increased domestic consumption and exchange rate flexibility there. Experts say most other Asian currencies likely will follow suit if China allows its currency to rise.

Nariman Behravesh, chief economist at Global Insight, an economic and financial forecasting company, says global trade pattern already might be shifting. "I think we are looking at what everybody hoped for but was a little worried about, that is a smooth adjustment in these big global imbalances," Behravesh told USINFO. In his view, the U.S. current account deficit peaked in the third quarter of 2006 and should drop to 5.8 percent of GDP in 2007.

A less likely scenario, according to Kalish, is that financial markets might start acting impatiently if

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America's Second Harvest Feeds Millions of Hungry People

By Louise Fenner
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – More than 25 million Americans receive food assistance each year through America's Second Harvest - The Nation's Food Bank Network, which brings together food banks and charities.

The network assists almost as many people as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) does through its food stamp program, said Maura Daly, director of America's Second Harvest. About two billion tons of food are donated and distributed nationally through the network each year.

As the nation's largest charitable hunger relief organization, America's Second Harvest, with headquarters in Chicago, comprises more than 200 food banks and food rescue organizations in the United States and Puerto Rico.

The food banks provide a centralized location where 50,000 U.S. charitable groups can get the canned goods, bread and other groceries they give to hungry people in their communities – at no cost. These local nonprofit agencies serve meals, hand out grocery boxes and feed the needy through a variety of programs.

The food rescue concept was created 40 years ago by a retired businessman in Phoenix who learned that grocery stores there were throwing away damaged food items. People eating at the soup kitchen where he volunteered told him they often rummaged through store garbage bins to help feed their families.

John van Hengel "believed there had to be a more dignified way for people to access that food," said Daly. With a grant from his church, van Hengel set up a warehouse in 1967 which became the nation's first food bank.

Without such operations, "a lot of feeding programs could not survive, and people at risk of hunger would need to be coming to the govern-

and produce from the USDA, along with funds to cover the expense of storing and transporting them. They do not receive other federal support. Financial donations come mostly from individuals, charitable foundations and corporations. Volunteers usually sort and pack donated items for transfer to soup kitchens, senior centers and other charitable agencies.

Each year around 11,000 volunteers work at the Capital Area Food Bank, said Smith. About one-third come from other states -- for instance, visiting church groups or high school classes that want to spend some time doing community service in addition to sightseeing.

Nationally, more than 1 million people volunteer at food banks or charitable food agencies each year, said Daly. "Volunteers are the lifeline of our network," she said.

Food banks also serve areas other than large cities. Roger Simon, executive director of the Idaho Foodbank in Boise, said 81,400 people in the

sparsely populated, mostly rural state receive food assistance each year. They are mostly the working poor, and many seek help after they use up their food stamp-allocation, he said.

One success story in Boise is Sue Coble, a woman with five children who once was homeless. In 1996, she founded Chefs to the Rescue, which collects more than 27,000 kilograms of prepared but unused food from restaurants in Boise each month and works with the Idaho

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Boise State University football players help load donated turkeys to be used for Thanksgiving meals. (Photo courtesy of Idaho Foodbank)

ment for help," said Brian Smith of the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington. That food bank, like others, receives donations of food and household items from manufacturers, grocery stores, restaurants, individuals and groups.

The retail food donations might be overstocked items or "the smashed boxes and dented cans that people might not buy -- but it's still good food," said Smith.

Most food banks also receive some commodities such as beans, cheese

Fact Sheet: State Summary of Global Internet Freedom Task Force

United State Department of State
Washington DC 20520
December 20, 2006

Fact Sheet

Global Internet Freedom Task Force (GIFT) Strategy: A Blueprint for Action

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established the Global Internet Freedom Task Force (GIFT) on February 14, 2006 as an internal State Department coordination group to address challenges to freedom of expression and the free flow of information on the Internet. The core aims of the GIFT are to maximize freedom of expression and the free flow of information and ideas, to minimize the success of repressive regimes in censoring and silencing legitimate debate, and to promote access to information and ideas over the Internet. We refer to such freedom of expression on the Internet as "Internet freedom." Since its launch in February 2006, the Task Force has developed a robust global Internet strategy that aims to monitor and respond to threats to Internet freedom and to advance the frontiers of Internet freedom by expanding access to the Internet. In executing this strategy, the State Department is coordinating its efforts with other U.S. government agencies and the National Security and National Economic Councils.

The GIFT Strategy is organized around three priorities:

MONITORING Internet freedom in countries around the world.

Spotlighting abuses of Internet freedom: We will expand monitoring of abuses and reporting on freedom of expression and the free flow of

information on the Internet in our annual human rights report.

Interim monitoring: Embassies will increase interim reporting of incidents related to Internet freedom so that we can react promptly as problems arise.

RESPONDING to challenges to Internet freedom.

Protesting abuses and raising awareness: When we become aware of serious incidents of Internet repression, we will express our concern promptly and directly to the foreign government involved.



Sustained persuasion in meetings with foreign officials: We are committed to pressing the message on Internet freedom in official dialogues with other countries, especially those in which Internet freedom is threatened.

Coordinating with international partners: We will work with like-minded governments to promote Internet freedom and to press other governments to live up to their existing international commitments regarding freedom of expression and the free flow of information and ideas.

Maintaining and expanding Internet freedom commitments in multilat-

eral organizations: We will work to ensure existing international commitments to the free flow of information and freedom of expression are upheld and replicated in appropriate international fora.

Work with stakeholders: We stand ready to engage appropriately with the technology industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders in a process aimed at developing shared principles to guide private sector activities in restrictive economies.

ADVANCING Internet freedom by expanding access to the Internet.

Expanding access in developing countries: Through multiple U.S. government programs (including USAID projects and The Telecommunications Leadership Program) and public-private partnerships (The Digital Freedom Initiative), the United States Government promotes expanded Internet access and the availability of information and communication technologies in developing countries.

Since 2004 the U.S. government has spent over \$250 million on projects that include providing telecommunications infrastructure, Internet access, computer hardware, and support for regulatory reform in order to ensure sustainable infrastructure development. These projects also include the design of websites and databases and training on information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Empowering users: Where appropriate, the U.S. Government will support the provision of unfiltered information to people living under conditions of censorship.

Grant Funds: The State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Hu-

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State Department Report Signals Importance of Religious Freedom

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Religious freedom is deeply rooted in American principles and history, according to Stephen Liston, director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. The department's annual International Religious Freedom Report is one of the most visible signals to both persecutor and persecuted of the importance the United States attaches to religious freedom, Liston said December 21.

Liston and other officials discussed the report's 2006 findings at a hearing before the House International Relations Committee. The annual review submitted to Congress, required by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, examines 197 countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914164724hmnietua0.1669384>).)

The act also requires the State Department to designate countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" as a "country of particular concern" (CPC). In November, Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan again were designated as CPCs, having also been on the 2005 list. Uzbekistan also was listed as a CPC. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061114150908mlenuh-ret0.4384882>).)

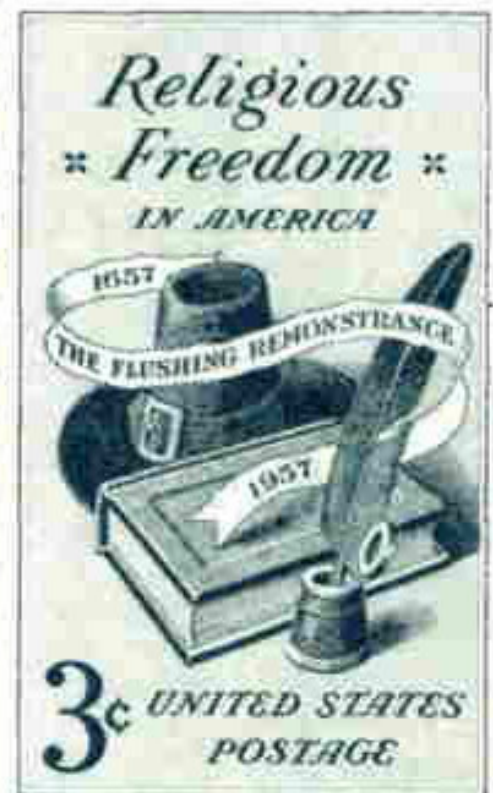
Additionally in November, Vietnam was removed from the CPC list,

which is the first time that a country has been removed from the list due to sufficient progress made as a result of diplomatic engagement, Liston said. "We view this as a very important milestone," he said. "The decision not to redesignate Vietnam is an important signal that our purpose is to improve conditions for religious believers, and that we will recognize progress when it occurs."

During the last two years, Liston said, the Vietnamese government has allowed hundreds of congregations to register, legalized hundreds of meeting places, allowed training of new clergy and released prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs. The United States hopes that Vietnam's progress will be a model for other nations, Liston said.

"There is no question that there still remains important work to do to advance religious freedom in Vietnam," Liston said. "Removal from the CPC list does not mean that religious freedom conditions are fully achieved." For example, some Buddhists in the country face restrictions on moving and meeting, he said.

The United States is working to help Vietnam resolve remaining religious freedom problems, Liston said. In his visit to Hanoi, Vietnam, in November, President Bush raised religious freedom issues in his meetings with the Vietnamese president and prime minister. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also met with religious leaders during the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Hanoi.



Liston reviewed the United States' concerns with the CPCs and the efforts it has mounted to work with nations to improve religious freedom. Liston focused much of his testimony on Uzbekistan, which was added to the CPC list because its violations of religious freedom are systematic and the situation there continues to deteriorate, he said.

The government of Uzbekistan has tightened its already restrictive religion law, harassed and deregistered Christian congregations and dramatically raised fines, Liston said.

Liston said Muslims in Uzbekistan have borne the brunt of the government's repression. The government often views conservative Islamic practice alone as grounds for suspicion of involvement in terrorism,

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U.S. Welcomes U.N. Security Council Resolution on Iran Sanctions

By Ralph Dannheisser
Washington File Special Correspondent

Washington -- The United States has welcomed the U.N. Security Council's unanimous action December 23 on sanctions against Iran for refusing to suspend nuclear enrichment programs, but stressed that further action is needed by individual nations and groupings to force Iranian compliance.

But, Burns said, "We want the international community to take further action and we're certainly not going to put all of our eggs in the U.N. basket."

"We're going to try to convince countries, especially the European Union countries [and] Japan to consider some of the financial measures that we have undertaken. ... We'd like to see countries stop doing business as usual with Iran," he added.

Burns said the Security Council vote should clear the way for further steps by countries that had argued they could not act in the absence of prior United Nations' action.

Burns cited as an example that "10 or 11" European nations have extended substantial export credits to Iran. "We would like countries to stop selling arms to Iran. We would like countries to try to limit export credits to Iran."

Burns specifically called on Russia and China, two nations that have been far less inclined toward imposing sanctions on the Iranian regime than the United States has been, to take additional steps to follow on the Security Council's action.

"Russia and China ... tell us that

they want to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability," he said. "We need to see more vigorous action by both of them. We'd like to see an end of the business as usual, the export credits that I mentioned, the military sales that are still going on."

Burns confirmed that President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin had discussed the Iran issue by telephone earlier December 23, but said he was not aware of the details of that conversation.

The under secretary said there is not much more that the United States, by itself, can do because it already has in place "full-scope sanctions on Iran in every conceivable area."

Burns expressed satisfaction that the Security Council action, taken under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter, came by unanimous vote after months of tough negotiations. He acknowledged that the resolution was not as comprehensive as the United States might have wanted, and said that if the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports a lack of Iranian compliance by a February 21, 2007, deadline, "then the council has an obligation to take stronger sanctions in the future."

Ticking off the major provisions of the resolution, he said it:

- Requires Iran to comply fully with the IAEA in resolving questions about the nation's nuclear program, and requires Iran to suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities at a plant at Natanz and to stop work on all heavy water-related projects, including construction of a heavy-water research reactor at Arak.

- Requires all states to avoid providing Iran with technical assistance, training or financial services that could contribute to a nuclear weapons development problem, a ballistic missile system or development of its enrichment facilities.

- Requires all states to freeze the assets of a specified list of individuals and entities identified as having a key role in Iran's nuclear program, and requires all states to notify the sanctions committee of travel by those individuals outside of Iran.

Burns said passage of the sanctions resolution will "drive up the costs to the Iranians of ... thumbing their nose at the international community by proceeding with these nuclear technological programs."

He stressed that the offer of negotiations, which Iran rejected in October, remains on the table. "Our hope is that the Iranians are going to look at this and conclude that they're effectively isolating themselves and that they should accept this offer of negotiations," he said.

Burns made clear that the United States' differences with the Iranian regime extend to more than just its nuclear ambitions.

"Our beef with the Iranians is three-fold: First is the clear effort to develop a nuclear weapons program, second is the fact that they're in effect the central banker funding [terrorist groups] Hezbollah, Hamas, PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine] General Command and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. And third, they're a major human rights violator of their own people," Burns said. ♦

American Muslims Go on Hajj . . .

(Continued from page 5)

his department "has been aggressive in prosecuting hate crimes ... and incidents of discrimination against Muslims." Regular meetings among senior U.S. officials and Muslim, Arab and South Asian leaders help address discrimination complaints quickly. "All issues of concern to these communities, including issues of profiling in airports, are regularly addressed at these meetings," he said.

Muslims not going on hajj mark the days leading up to Eid-ul-Adha at the end of December with acts of generosity. Syed Hafeez of the Montgomery County Muslim Council in Maryland told USINFO his group will distribute gift food baskets to 500 local needy families and toys to 1200 children before Christmas.

After Eid, when animals are sacrificed to commemorate Ibrahim's

readiness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God, the tradition of sharing the meat with friends and family will include the less fortunate. The council, coordinating with the county, will donate hundreds of kilograms of meat to the needy.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Fact Sheet: State Summary of Global Internet Freedom Task Force . . .

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man Rights and Labor announced a \$500,000 grant program for innovative proposals and cutting-edge approaches to combat Internet censorship in countries seeking to restrict basic human rights, including freedom of expression.

Freedom of Expression is a Universal Right. The right to freedom of expression is provided for by both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Cove-

nant on Civil and Political Rights. This right includes, with limited exceptions, the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers. The international human rights framework provided by these instruments applies to communication on the Internet just as it applies to other forms of communication.

While international law allows for limited restrictions on speech in narrowly circumscribed circumstances for legitimate government purposes

such as protection of "national security" or "public order," repressive regimes misuse such exceptions as a pretext to censor speech about democracy and human rights and suppress dissent.

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Slower U.S. Economy Still Expected To Drive Global Growth in 2007 . . .

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they become convinced that the orderly adjustment is not taking place. "In that case, they can bid down the value of the dollar quickly, and then you can have some havoc in the financial markets, a rapid decline of the dollar, a rapid rise of long-term U.S. interest rates," he said.

Behravesch agrees this outcome is unlikely. The dollar still enjoys a unique status as the global currency. If it starts to depreciate too quickly, foreign central banks are likely to intervene, he said.

"The reason is that a hard landing [sudden loss in value] of the dollar would probably do more damage outside the United States than in-

side. So it is in everybody's interest for the adjustment to occur in an orderly way," Behravesch said.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Experimental Malaria Vaccine Targets Mosquitoes, not People

By Cheryl Pellerin
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Researchers at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) have developed an experimental vaccine that theoretically could eliminate malaria from entire regions by killing the malaria parasite in an area's mosquitoes, rather than preventing or limiting malaria in vaccinated individuals.

The one-celled parasites that cause malaria in people are *Plasmodium falciparum* and three closely related species. Each parasite lives part of its life in humans and part in mosquitoes. The disease is transmitted to people in the bite of an *Anopheles* mosquito and can result in severe headache, high fever, chills and vomiting.

The vaccine, tested only in mice so far, would help a vaccinated person's immune system eliminate the parasite directly from the digestive tract of a malaria-carrying mosquito, after the mosquito has fed on the person's antibody-enhanced blood.

Unlike many vaccines, this one eliminates the parasite from mosquitoes rather than protecting a vaccinated person from the disease.

Although several kinds of malaria vaccines are in development and testing, none has yet been licensed for widespread use.

Scientists at the NIH National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, in partnership with researchers at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, developed the vaccine.

COMPLEX LIFE CYCLE

Of the four species of parasites that infect people, *Plasmodium falciparum* is responsible for most malaria deaths, especially in Africa. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061218144956AKllen-noCcM0.1342279>).)



In 2004, according to the World Health Organization, the worldwide incidence of malaria was about 300 million cases a year and 1.3 million deaths, mostly among African children.

Each parasite is distinct under the microscope and produces a different pattern of symptoms. Two or more species can live in the same area and infect a single person at the same time.

When an infected female *Anopheles* mosquito bites a person, she takes

in blood. At the same time, she injects saliva into a person's bloodstream that contains the infectious form of the parasite. Once a malaria parasite infects humans, it changes in form and size as it invades different cell types, including red blood cells and liver cells.

Inside a person, the thread-like parasite quickly invades a liver cell. There, over a week or two (depending on the species), each parasite releases thousands of daughter cells into the bloodstream, where they invade red blood cells and eat hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying part of the blood.

In the red blood cells, the parasite cells go through another series of stages, and the infection continues until it is brought under control by medicine or the body's immune defenses. The parasite can complete its life cycle through the mosquito because some of its cells that penetrate red blood cells change into reproductive cells that circulate in a person's bloodstream.

When a blood-seeking female *Anopheles* bites a person who has parasite reproductive cells circulating in the bloodstream, she sucks up and fertilizes the reproductive cells, which embed themselves in the mosquito gut before migrating by the thousands to the mosquito's saliva-producing glands. There, the cycle begins again when she bites her next victim.

EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE

According to the researchers, many experimental vaccines have been tried against the form of the parasite that lives in people but have been unsuccessful or have produced limited immunity.

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Experimental Malaria Vaccine Targets Mosquitoes, not People . . .

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The Plasmodium cells evade the human immune system by hiding in liver and blood cells, making them difficult to target with a vaccine.

In this work, the researchers described several strategies for using conjugate technology -- which joins or "conjugates" molecules the immune system has difficulty recognizing to molecules it easily recognizes -- to make an effective vaccine.

The vaccine targets a protein called Pfs25 that is found only on the surfaces of the parasite reproductive cells that embed themselves in the mosquito gut.

When injected into human volunteers, Pfs25 fails to generate enough antibodies to target the parasite. But primed by the conjugate vaccine, the immune system starts making antibodies -- immune

proteins that target specific molecules. The antibodies then eliminate molecules that the immune system normally would fail to detect.

The research revealed that the antibodies could completely eliminate the parasite reproductive cells.

"With conjugate technology, NIH researchers have developed effective vaccines against such scourges as ... meningitis and typhoid fever," said Dr. Elias Zerhouni, NIH director, in a December 18 statement.

"The experimental malaria vaccine," he added, "shows great promise for combating a terrible disease that exacts a devastating toll on the world's children."

The study authors said Psv25H, a molecule similar to Pfs25, is found on the surface of proteins of another Plasmodium species that causes malaria, Plasmodium vivax. They wrote that the conjugate tech-

nology easily could be adapted to make a vaccine against Psv25H.

The full text (<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/103/48/18243?maxto-show=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=malaria+vaccine%2C+pfs25&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>) of an article describing the work is available on the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Web site.

Additional information (<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/malaria.htm>) about malaria is available on the NIAID Web site.

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State Department Report Signals Importance of Religious Freedom . . .

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Liston said. Although the United States recognizes that Uzbekistan faces a legitimate security threat from groups that have used religion as an excuse for violence, Liston said, the government continues to target and arrest observant Muslims who have no ties to extremists.

Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John V. Hanford III has had several positive meetings with the ambassador from Uzbekistan since the country be-

came a CPC, and the United States hopes to work with the government to help it meet international standards for protecting and promoting religious freedom, Liston said.

The full text (<http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/testimony.asp?subnav=close>) of the prepared testimony of those who appeared before the committee is available on the House International Relations Committee Web site.

For more information, see International Religious Freedom (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/intl_religious_freedom.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Experts Urge Nations To Report Flu Cases Immediately, Share Data

By Cheryl Pellerin
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Delegates from more than 72 countries are calling on all nations to report influenza cases immediately and share epidemiological data and samples.

The reporting and data sharing provisions are in a declaration issued December 18 after the Fourth International Conference on Avian Influenza December 6-8 in Bamako, Mali.

At the ministerial and pledging conference, hosted by the African Union and Mali in conjunction with the European Union, donor governments pledged nearly \$500 million to address avian influenza outbreaks that have occurred in 55 nations and to prepare for a possible human pandemic. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061208145536lcni-rellep2.494448e-02>).)

At the meeting, the United States pledged \$100 million, bringing its total to \$434 million for international assistance, a key component in the U.S. national strategy for dealing with pandemic influenza.

"I want to pay tribute to the United States for their continued engagement on this issue," Dr. David Nabarro, senior U.N. system coordinator for avian and human influenza, said at a December 19 briefing at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, "and ... on trying to make sure that the focus on avian influenza, and in particular on the potential pandemic, is one that is maintained long term." The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that, to



date, more than 200 million domesticated birds have died or have been culled to prevent disease spread, and the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 258 human cases of avian influenza have been reported in 10 countries, with 154 deaths.

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

The Bamako Declaration, approved by all delegates, says the fight against highly pathogenic avian influenza "should be used to strengthen the struggle against other emerging diseases" and urges renewed efforts to build capacity in animal and human health services through early voluntary implementation of WHO's revised International Health Regulations.

The updated rules are designed to prevent and protect against the international spread of diseases and minimize interference with world travel and trade.

"We in the United States government," said Ambassador John Lange, the State Department's special representative on avian and pandemic influenza, "are urging other nations around the world to comply now with the provisions of the revised International Health

Regulations ... before those regulations enter into effect next year."

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt announced December 13 that the United States has accepted formally the International Health Regulations and will begin to implement the new international rules now rather than wait until they officially take effect in June 2007.

Under the revised regulations, countries that accept the regulations have much broader responsibility for preventing, detecting and responding to public-health emergencies of international concern, such as avian influenza. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=May&x=20050523150433cmretrop0.6263849&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

Current regulations, adopted by WHO member states in 1969, apply to three diseases -- cholera, yellow fever and plague. The revised regulations include smallpox, polio, severe acute respiratory syndrome and new strains of human influenza, whose occurrences member states must report immediately to WHO.

ANIMAL AND HUMAN HEALTH

Animal and human health are linked inextricably, and experts around the world are urging a buildup of capacity in veterinary and human health infrastructures to deal with the current avian flu outbreak and with future emerging diseases.

"The ongoing spread of the disease in affected countries and new out-

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Experts Urge Nations To Report Flu Cases . . .

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breaks are an expression of the lack of veterinary infrastructure," said Ron DeHaven, administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To help build such infrastructure, the United States is working with the FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

On December 19, a nine-person team of bird flu experts from the Crisis Management Center, an FAO-OIE initiative, arrived in the Republic of Korea to assess regional risks and protective measures after three recent outbreaks of the disease among domestic poultry in rural areas south of Seoul.

The team, drawn from South Korea and other nations, includes veterinary epidemiologists, wildlife veterinarians, biologists and poultry specialists who will examine the rela-

tionships among poultry production, marketing and wildlife sectors to understand better potential disease movement among chickens and risks to or from wild birds, FAO said.

"This threat is not going to go away in a hurry," Nabarro said. "It's going to be with us for years to come and our defenses are still not strong enough to cope with it."

For ongoing coverage of the disease and efforts to combat it, see Bird Flu (Avian Influenza) (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html).

More information (<http://www.who.int/csr/ihr/en/>) about the revised International Health Regulations is available at the WHO Web site.

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America's Second Harvest Feeds Millions of Hungry People . . .

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Foodbank to distribute it to the needy.

A "landmark event" for America's Second Harvest was the response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, said Daly. In advance of the storms, trucks were loaded with food and water and staged in safe locations near the Gulf Coast. More than 2,500 truckloads of food, water and other supplies, from diapers to can openers, were sent to the area. "In times of disaster, we can mobilize within moments," Daly said.

According to a study by America's Second Harvest, the number of people receiving food assistance through the network increased 9 percent between 2000 and 2004, and more people needed assistance on a temporary, rather than a long-term, basis.

"Our network is really serving those people who are temporarily having to make tough choices between food and other basic necessities" such as heat, medicine or health care, she said.

For more information, see Volunteerism (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/volunteerism.html) and the eJournal, Giving: U.S. Philanthropy (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0506/ijse/ijse0506.htm>). ♦



Volunteers collect and sort donations at the Bay Area Food Bank in Theodore, Alabama. (Photo courtesy of America's Second Harvest)